DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 748 CS 202 602

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TITLE The Journalistic and Academic Backgrounds of Teachers of Skills Courses in Accredited Schools and Departments of Journalism.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 12p.; Survey conducted for the Conference on "Education for Newspaper Journalists in the Seventies and Beyond" (Reston, Virginia, Oct. 31-Nov. 2, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *College Teachers; Courses; Editing; Higher Education; *Journalism; Layout (Publications); National Surveys; Photography; *Teacher Background; *Teacher Qualifications; Writing

ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted during the spring and summer of 1973 to determine the media and academic backgrounds of people who are currently teaching such skills as writing, editing, photography, and layout in accredited journalism programs. Usable responses to a questionnaire sent to randomly selected faculty members of the Association for Education in Journalism showed that: teachers of skills courses tend to have considerable journalistic experience, especially with newspapers, with 47 percent having ten or more years of full-time experience; 68 percent of the teachers of skills courses have more than two years of teaching experience, while 65 percent are senior faculty members; most teachers have earned at least one graduate degree (58 percent a doctorate and another 35 percent a masters), with 75 percent having had an undergraduate major in journalism or mass communication; and about two-thirds of the teachers published at least one item in the 1970's (one-fifth reported no publication at all). Five tables of findings are included. (JM)

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THE JOURNALISTIC AND ACADEMIC BACKGROUNDS OF TEACHERS OF SKILLS COURSES IN ACCREDITED SCHOOLS AND DEPARTMENTS OF JOURNALISM

This survey was conducted for the Conference on "Education for Newspaper Journalists in the Seventies and Beyond," sponsored by the American Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation in cooperation with the Association for Education in Journalism, to be held at Reston, Virginia, October 31 - November 2, 1973.

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Published in:

PROCEEDINGS: Education for Newspaper Journalists in the Seventies and Beyond, ANPA Foudation, Washington, D.C., 1974.

CS202602

Most of the people who teach journalistic skills courses in accredited journalism programs have two or more years of full-time professional journalistic experience, have more than two years of teaching experience, and hold at least one graduate degree.

These are some of the findings of a survey conducted during the spring and summer of 1973 to determine the media and academic backgrounds of the people who are currently teaching such skills as writing, editing, photography and layout.

An analysis of the entire membership list of the Association for Education in Journalism as of May, 1973, (not just those members who were listed in the January, 1973, issue of Journalism Educator) revealed that 284 people were listed as teaching skills courses in the 61 accredited programs.

Two-thirds (189) of these faculty members were randomly selected for the study.[1] A questionnaire was developed, and two mailings--plus a few follow-up telephone calls--produced responses from 162. Four respondents were no longer teaching skills courses, so they were dropped from the study. Consequently, the universe as operationally defined numbered 280, the mail sample numbered 185, and usable responses were received from 158. Thus, the response rate was 85.4% of the mail sample.[2]

Professional journalistic experience

As shown in Table I, teachers of skills courses tend to have considerable professional journalistic experience, especially with newspapers. Approximately 47% of them have 10 or more years of full-time experience, and only 10% have less than two years.

Most of this experience was gained in regular, ongoing employment rather than by an accumulation of short summer stints. Some 80% of these teachers have held at least one full-time journalistic position for more than two years.

The position that was held the longest was most likely (61%) to have been in the news-editorial department of a newspaper or a wire service. For an additional 9% of the teachers, the longest-held journalistic position was in some other department of a newspaper.

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[1]The decision to use a proportionately large sample rather than the universe was made to enable the researchers to "eat their cake and have it, too." By using a sample, they could have better control of the study, thus producing a better response rate and better quality data. At the same time, since the universe was comparatively small, the high response rate insured that the usable sample constituted a large segment of the universe, resulting in rather little sampling error.

[2]The standard error for a proportion of .5 in this study is .017. This means, for example, that if 50% of the respondents had a particular attribute, the chances are 95 out of 100 that between 46.6% and 53.4% of the universe had that attribute. For more extreme percentages--in either direction--the 95 per cent confidence interval is even smaller.

For 43% of those whose longest-held position was in the news-editorial department of a newspaper, that job was with a daily of 100,000 circulation or more. Some 28% worked for a newspaper of 20,000 to 99,000 circulation, and 29% were employed on a paper of under 20,000 circulation. (Approximately half of those who were with papers of under 20,000 circulation were editors--and frequently publishers--of weekly newspapers.)

The teachers of skills courses were highly likely (94%) to have gained journalistic experience of some sort while they were still college students. About 75% reported working on campus publications, and 42% worked for off-campus newspapers, magazines, or wire services. (Naturally, many of the respondents had more than one kind of journalistic experience while still in college.) Still others gained experience in broadcasting, public relations, and advertising.

Professional academic experience

Table 2 shows that 68% of the teachers of skills courses have more than two years of teaching experience, while 65% are senior faculty members with rank of professor or associate professor.

Teaching is clearly the primary duty of most of these faculty members. Approximately 51% devote more than half their working hours to teaching, and another 32% give more than one-fourth of their time to teaching.

Administrative duties take more than one-fourth of the working time of 26% of the teachers of skills courses.

These faculty members, however, do not devote a large share of their time to research and writing, the advising of students, or consulting.

Although a few of the teachers of skills courses never left the full-time practice of journalism to enter teaching (they teach part-time or they never had such full-time employment), most of them did, and 130 gave their reasons for doing so.

The reasons--paraphrased for categorization--that were most often given (28%) were "opportunity to pursue academic interests" and "disenchantment or boredom" with the previous job. Some 22% of the teachers said they made the switch because they thought that by doing so they could improve the practice of journalism by helping to train and educate more good young journalists.

A question as to whether they intend to leave teaching and resume their professional journalistic careers was answered by 141 of the respondents. Only 6% said they intend to leave teaching, but an additional 26% said they are undecided.

Educational background

Most of the teachers of skills courses have earned at least one graduate degree and are likely to have majored in journalism or mass communication at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. About 75% of them had such an undergraduate major, with another 10% majoring in one of the humanities, as shown in Table 3.

Some 58% of the teachers have earned doctorates, while another 35% have masters degrees. Many of those in the latter group are now candidates for doctorates. Even though only 6% are under 30 years of age (Table 4),

27% have earned their highest degree in the 1970's. This finding reflects a general pattern of entering the full-time practice of journalism after completion of the baccalaureate degree, then several years later returning to graduate school.

Among those teachers whose highest degree is the masters, 82% majored in journalism or mass communication while obtaining that degree, and 13% majored in one of the humanities. Among those whose highest degree is the doctorate, 74% majored in journalism or mass communication, 12% majored in education, and 10% majored in one of the humanities.

Almost 40% of the earned doctorates were awarded by three universities--Wisconsin (17%), Minnesota (13%), and Illinois (9%). Each of four other universities provided the doctoral education of about 7% of the teachers. They are Iowa, Missouri, Southern Illinois, and Stanford. In other words, these seven institutions awarded about two-thirds of the doctorates held by teachers of skills courses in accredited journalism programs.

Demographics

Table 4 shows quite clearly that the teaching of skills courses is overwhelmingly the province of white middle-aged males.

Professional Activities

About two-thirds of the teachers have published at least one item in the 1970's, as shown in Table 5. On the other hand, about one-fifth of the teachers report no publications at all. For about one-fifth of the faculty members, the most recent publication is a book. For another fifth it is an academic journal article, and for still another fifth it is a trade journal article.

Membership in Sigma Delta Chi is reported by 77% of the teachers of skills courses, and 21% are members of Kappa Tau Alpha. About 46% belong to one or more professional journalistic societies such as the National Conference of Editorial Writers, the National Association of Science Writers, and the National Press Photographers Association. Membership in one or more professional academic societies, such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Modern Languages Association, and the American Sociological Association, is reported by 32%.

Because of the method of sample selection, all the teachers included in this survey are members of the Association for Education in Journalism. That fact leads to a word of caution concerning generalizations from the data of this study. Although the findings are readily generalizable to all skills teachers in accredited programs who are members of AEJ, they are not necessarily generalizable to those skills teachers who are not AEJ members.

Something can be said, however, about those people who are not AEJ members. One sizable group of them comprises part-time teachers who are full-time journalists "downtown." These people, of course, are long on media experience, but they probably are less likely to have advanced degrees than are the AEJ members.

Another group of skills teachers who are not especially likely to

be AEJ members are those who are graduate students rather than regular faculty members. These people tend to be somewhat younger than regular faculty members and, obviously, none of them has completed a doctorate, although a considerable portion of them have masters degrees. The authors' personal observation is that a graduate student is seldom the instructor of record (as distinguished from being an assistant to a regular faculty member) for a skills course unless he already has at least a year or two of professional journalistic practice. The validity of that observation, however, cannot be tested by the data of this study.

There are, of course, regular faculty members who are not members of AEJ, but their numbers are not large.

In all, it is safe to say that a majority of the skills courses taught in accredited journalism programs are taught by AEJ members who were included in the universe sampled for this study.

TABLE I - PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTIC EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS OF SKILLS COURSES IN ACCREDITED JOURNALISM PROGRAMS (n=158)

	Number	Per Cent
Years of Full-time Professional Journalistic Experience:		
10 or more	74	46.8
2-9	68	43.1
Less than 2	14	8.9
None	2	1.3
Years of Service in the One Full-time Journalistic Position Held Longest:		
10 or more	29	18.4
2-9	98	62.0
Less than 2	26	16.5
None or not ascertained	5	3.1
Type of Service in the One Full-time Journalistic Position Held Longest:		
Newspaper (news-editorial) or wire service	97	61.4
Newspaper (non news-editorial)	14	8.9
Broadcast news	9	5.7
Public relations/advertising	24	15.2
All other	9	5.7
None or not ascertained	5	3.1
Types of Journalistic Experience Gained While in College (more than one answer permitted:		
Campus publication	119	75.3
Off-campus newspaper, magazine, or wire service	67	42.4
Campus broadcasting	12	7.6
Off-campus broadcasting	7	4.4
Campus public relations	12	7.6
Off-campus public relations/advertising	6	3.8
All other	7	4.4
None or not ascertained	10	6.3

TABLE 2 - PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS IN SKILLS COURSES IN ACCREDITED JOURNALISM PROGRAMS

	Number	Per Cent
Years of teaching:	(n=158)	
10 or more	25	15.8
3-9	83	52.5
1-2	50	31.6
Current academic rank:	(n=158)	
Professor	60	38.0
Associate professor	43	27.2
Assistant professor	37	23.4
Instructor	16	10.1
Other	2	1.3
Proportion of time given to:	(n=158)	
Teaching--		
25% or less	26	16.5
26-50%	51	32.3
51-75%	62	39.2
76% or more	19	12.0
Advising students--		
25% or less	143	90.5
26-50%	15	9.5
Research and writing--		
25% or less	142	89.9
26-50%	13	8.2
51-75%	2	1.3
76% or more	1	0.6
Administration--		
25% or less	117	74.0
26-50%	27	17.1
51-75%	4	2.5
75% or more	10	6.3
Consulting--		
25% or less	156	98.7
26-50%	2	1.3

(continued)

Table 2 - Continued

Reasons for Leaving Professional Practice of Journalism for Teaching (more than one reason permitted):

	Number (n=130)	Per Cent
Opportunity to pursue academic interests	36	27.7
Disenchantment or boredom	36	27.7
To help improve journalism	28	21.5
Better pay/working conditions	16	12.3
Greater security/stability	7	5.4
Personal reasons (unspecified)	10	7.7

Intend to Leave Teaching and Resume Professional Journalism Career:

	(n=141)	
No	97	68.8
Yes	8	5.7
Undecided	36	25.5

TABLE 3 - EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF TEACHERS OF SKILLS COURSES IN ACCREDITED JOURNALISM PROGRAMS

	Number	Per Cent
Highest degree earned:	(n=158)	
Doctorate	91	57.6
Masters	56	35.4
Bachelors	9	5.7
Other	2	1.3
When highest degree was earned:	(n=158)	
1970 or later	43	27.2
1960-1969	68	43.0
1950-1959	24	15.2
1949 or earlier	23	14.6
Undergraduate major:	(n=158)	
Journalism or mass communication	118	74.7
Humanities (language, history, etc.)	16	10.1
Education	9	5.7
Social sciences (economics, psychology, political science, etc.)	4	2.5
All others	11	7.0
Major for highest degree earned - masters:	(n=56)	
Journalism or mass communication	46	82.1
Humanities	7	12.5
Social sciences	3	5.4
Major for highest degree earned - doctorate:	(n=91)	
Journalism or mass communication	67	73.6
Education	11	12.1
Humanities	9	9.9
Social sciences	1	1.1
All others	3	3.3

TABLE 4 - DEMOGRAPHICS OF TEACHERS OF SKILLS COURSES IN ACCREDITED JOURNALISM PROGRAMS (n=158)

	Number	Per Cent
Age:		
29 or younger	10	6.3
30-49	91	57.6
50-64	50	31.6
65 or older	5	3.2
Not ascertained	2	1.3
Sex:		
Male	151	95.6
Female	7	4.4
Race:		
White	155	98.1
Not ascertained	3	1.9

TABLE 5 - PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC AND JOURNALISTIC ACTIVITIES OF TEACHERS OF SKILLS COURSES IN ACCREDITED JOURNALISM PROGRAMS (n=158)

	Number	Per Cent
Type of most recent publication:		
Trade journal	35	22.2
Academic journal	34	21.5
Book	33	20.9
Popular media	16	10.1
Other	7	4.4
None	33	20.9
Year of most recent publication:		
1970 or later	103	65.2
1960-1969	20	12.9
1959 or earlier	2	1.3
None	33	20.9
Memberships in Professional Organizations Other Than Association for Education in Journalism:		
Sigma Delta Chi	122	77.2
Kappa Tau Alpha	33	20.9
American Association of University Professors	25	15.8
Women in Communications	5	3.2
Professional journalistic societies (National Conference of Editorial Writers, National Association of Science Writers, etc.)	73	46.2
Professional academic societies (American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Psychological Association, etc.)	50	31.6
Press clubs	30	19.0
None	3	1.9